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A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF COMMON ERRORS IN
GRAMMAR IN GRADES SEVEN THROUGH TEN IN THE
CARVER SCHOOL, AMARILLO, TEXAS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR
IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

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A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF COMMON ERRORS IN GRAMMAR IN GRADES
SEVEN THROUGH TEN IN THE CARVER SCHOOL, AMARILLO,
TEXAS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE
TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

By

Jewelle Luethyl Allen

A Thesis in English Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Graduate Division

of

Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College
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Approved for the
Department of English
and the Graduate School by

June L. Campbell
Chairman of English Department

Dean of the Graduate School

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The writer gratefully acknowledges indebtedness to Miss Anne L. Campbell, head of the English Department, for her guidance in the preparation of this thesis. This study could not have been prepared without the cooperation of the English teachers of the Carver High School; for their cooperation, the author is grateful.

J. L. A.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband,
whose encouragement and devotion toward me in
the preparation of this study have been invaluable.

J. L. A.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Nature of the Problem

Thousands of freshmen who enter Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College and other institutions of learning each year have a very poor background in English. Numerous studies have been made dealing with problems of grammar in the elementary and secondary school. The writer of the thesis having become interested in these studies decided to carry on an experiment in four classes in order to discover what errors in grammar troubled her pupils most.

Every teacher of English, whether he teaches in the elementary school, in the junior high school, in the senior high school or even in the college knows how frequently the oral and written grammar of his students are marred by inexcusable errors. He, also, is acquainted with the fact that before beginning a study of grammatical usage, certain principles must be set up as guides upon which to build the objective study. The first step in intellectual training is to impress upon a boy's mind the idea of science, method, order, principle, and system; of rule and exception, of richness and harmony. This is commonly and

excellently done by making him begin with grammar.¹

Life has purpose and value for all, far beyond the attainment of a specialized skill. Consequently, there should be a balance between the acquisition of skills and techniques and the development of a sense of appreciation, awakened by the desire for correct language usage and communication with the world. Especially in English should this be true, for correct grammatical constructions and language usage have a definite practical application. The task of finding errors and determining the cause of them has become very acute in the light of the emphasis being placed on correct language usage. "Everyone who does not express himself effectively is at a disadvantage. The school recognizes this when it makes the development of language abilities one of its most important jobs,"² says Virginia Alwin in her article, "A New Program for Teaching Expression in Language".

Grammar must be taught in the sense that it will affect the speech and writing habits of the pupil and in the sense that it accurately describes the mechanism of communication.

English and speech classes should help students to grow

¹ Charles H. Ward, What Is English (Chicago, 1925), p. 76.

² Virginia Alwin, "A New Program for Teaching Expression in Language," School Review, LVIII (May, 1950), 277.

in effective personality and social adjustment through consideration of their own problem in speech, writing, or other activities. Language arts assume leadership in improving the mechanical skills of speaking, writing, reading, and listening.¹

It is a general fact that the correct grammatical usage does not exist apart from expression, but as an aid to expression.²

Use of a standard accepted form of English largely determines the kind of success that makes security and progress possible.

Peter G. Perrin emphasizes this fact: "Fundamentally, good English is speaking or writing on the levels of English that are appropriate to the subject and to the particular situation that faces the speaker or the writer. It means a right choice among the levels of usage."³

Speech actually provides the acceptable standard of usage. Speech exists on every human level, social area, and mixture with foreign tongues. It is modified by the user and climatic

¹ Hardy Finch, "The 1950 English Teacher," Scholastic Teacher (September, 1950), 17.

² W. Wilbur Hatfield, An Experience Curriculum (New York: 1935), pp. 247-255.

³ Peter G. Perrin, An Index to English (Dallas, 1939), p. 13.

conditions.

S. I. Hayakawa in Language in Action says: "To be able to read and write, therefore, is to learn to profit by and take part in the greatest human achievement - that which makes all other human achievement possible."¹

Errors in grammatical usage exist and methods are provided to correct this usage. Writing, not speech, is the source of usage. "Vulgar English seems essentially poverty-stricken. It uses less of the resources of the language and few forms are used very frequently. Poor English is a handicap to effective communication."²

Scope of the Problem

For the four year period in which the investigator has taught in the Carver School, our graduates have not been placed in the upper bracket of English students in the institutions where they have continued their education. In an attempt to solve this problem of the teacher of English, the writer of this thesis carried on an experiment in four grades in order to discover what common errors needed to be eradicated;

¹ S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Action (New York, 1943), p. 201.

² Charles C. Fries, The Structure of English (New York, 1952), p. 288.

and on the basis of these findings to make suggestions for the simplification of the content of grammar and the method of teaching it.

This is the study of the most common errors in grammar made by one hundred and eighty-eight pupils in grades seven through ten in the Carver School, Amarillo, Texas. The writer aims to call attention to a condition which is certainly not peculiar to this school alone, but is a condition concerning teachers of English today.

Purpose of the Problem

Good English is that form of speech which is appropriate to the purpose of the speaker, true to the language as it is, and is comfortable to speaker and listener. It is the product of custom, neither cramped by rule nor freed from all restraint; it is never fixed but changes with organic life of the language.¹

Therefore the purposes of this study are:

1. To compile the most common errors in grades seven through ten in the Carver School, Amarillo, Texas.
2. To determine what errors occur most frequently.
3. To use the error analysis as a criterion for offering suggested methods of improving the teaching of grammar.

¹ Robert C. Pooley, Teaching English Usage (New York, 1946), p. 14.

4. To determine under normal conditions how frequently the students would have an opportunity to use the form incorrectly.
5. To determine in the gradation of social usage whether the error would be classified by the majority of the best writers and speakers as illiterate usage, disputable usage, or merely a form that is not preferable.

As a result of the application of the purposes listed above, the writer hopes to offer suggestions which will improve the teaching of grammar and the usage of grammar of the students in the study.

Hypothesis

This study is based on the hypothesis that a comprehensive study of the errors in grammar on a given level will suggest improved teaching methods, and that authoritative methods become aids when they are used to meet the needs of the students.

J. M. Horst in an article, "English in Human Relationship," points out how a comprehensive study may be of value to the students and the teacher. In a unit on "Recreation" the teacher noted errors in oral and written work, particularly verb errors. The errors were listed by the instructor and reasons advanced for their misuse by the students. Following the discussions and explanations were a series of short drill

exercises. A method has been used to motivate interest and another phase of the work is in order. Improvement in the errors formerly made is expected. Correct usage is the true evaluation of work done to improve language usage.¹

Sub-problems

Sub-problems of this investigation are:

1. Incorrect punctuation and capitalization in written work will tend to show a lack of ability in effective language usage.
2. A limited vocabulary restricts thought expression.
3. Spelling is an important factor in correct grammatical usage.

In the light of attempting to study closely the most common errors in grammar in a given situation, the writer discovered other areas of misuse in language usage. Punctuation marks incorrectly used caused incorrect emphasis upon desired points. An entire article can be interpreted incorrectly because of mistaken and incorrect punctuation usage.

Words are the only things that last forever. The thousands of generations of men who did not write are forgotten in the oblivion of the past. But those who recorded their thoughts and feelings can be as alive and close to us now as our next-

¹ J. M. Horst, "English in Human Relationships," English Journal, XXXVII (December, 1948), 524.

door neighbors. A limited vocabulary naturally limits the way in which a thought is conveyed. If expression is an aid to effective communication, the vocabulary is of utmost importance.

Correctly spelled words should be seized by the armfuls, not just one by one. Effective work is done through careful planning and practice; therefore spelling -correct spelling is necessary for the proper results to be obtained.

Significance of the Problem

It is hoped that this study will assist the investigator in improving the present teaching methods used in the Carver School and therefore result in more effective usage among her pupils.

It is further hoped that the methods used in this study will benefit other teachers of English in the same school and those in similar situations.

Delimitations

This study is limited to grades seven through ten in the Carver School, Amarillo, Texas. These four grades have a total of one hundred and eighty-eight students. A further delimitation of this study is that it is confined to written work

by the students in these classes for the school term of 1952-1953. No attempt is made to discuss errors in oral usage.

The data analyzed in this study represent the most common errors in grammar made by these students.

Related Studies

Further research has revealed that this is not the first attempt to investigate errors in grammar in a given locale. Related studies have been made and articles have been written which in some manner, if not always in the area of a comprehensive study of grammatical errors, bear some definite relation to this study.

The first part of the investigation is concerned with setting up proof for the assumption that this study deals with grammatical errors in written composition. To be considered, however, is the fact that correct methods must be used if desired objectives are to be realized in any teaching course.

In 1947, William L. Armstrong of Lincoln High School, Dallas, Texas, offered a study: A Survey of Errors in Senior Grammar at Lincoln High School, Dallas, Texas. The writer of this thesis did not offer all errors in senior grammar at Lincoln, but concentrated upon spelling, pronunciation, punctuation, verb forms and pronoun forms.

As a result of this study recommendations were made for a better understanding of the needs, and problems of the students in grammar and cooperation of every department in the school to improve written and spoken grammar.

Willie Helen Carrol of Prairie View College, Prairie View, Texas, also contributed to this field in 1947, A Study of Functional Grammar. The writer of this thesis discussed methods of teaching grammar in fifty Negro high schools in Texas. The grammar being taught becomes of value to the pupil when he is able to communicate on the levels of English that are appropriate to the subject and to the situation involving the speaker. The correct usage of grammar is determined by its function.

Among the recommendations offered were a need for more competent teachers of English and teachers of English who are not confined to textbooks alone.

Dora V. Smith in the December, 1944 Journal of Educational Research published an article entitled, "Recent Procedures in the Evaluation of Programs of English," which leads us to believe that one of the much debated questions in the English curriculum is the value of a knowledge of English grammar as a basis for the improvement of English usage and style. The grammar which has been taught is futile unless it affects the speech and writing habits of the pupils. English usage becomes

effective when accuracy in communication is achieved.

Further investigation revealed Robert L. Evans' contribution, A Study in the Measurement of Ability in English Correctness, from the University of Iowa in 1938. The thesis emphasized an "error correction type test" in checking errors for a grammar analysis.

Harry N. Rivlin's unpublished doctoral thesis on Functional Grammar at Teacher's College, Columbia University, New York, emphasizes: "A writer or speaker is using good English when he is able to cope with the situation confronting him."

Irene Armes of Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas, contributed a study: The Most Common Errors in Grammar and the Simplification of the Teaching of Grammar. Two observations were made. 1. Through twenty years of teaching the writer observed from year to year that pupils are troubled with practically the same errors and that usages difficult to teach in one class are also difficult to teach in other classes; 2. The writer also observed that in the standard tests given to her classes for ten years, the scores in grammatical usage for students vary little from the score of pupils in various parts of the United States.

A Study of the Analysis of the Errors Made by Prairie View College Freshmen 1944-1945 was made by Julia Kitrell Dean in

1945. A record of the errors made during the period of one year was recorded as a means of measuring improvement among the students in the study. A percentage type of tabulation was done to show comparison of improvement and non-improvement.

Chapter II

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

It has been estimated that one-half of all speech errors are with verbs.¹ The reasons for this are obvious. People use verbs more than they use any other part of speech. Verbs change their forms more often than any other part of speech. The change in form is the general cause of all errors in grammar. The changes in form, for voice, mood, tense, number, and person confuse the pupil. The majority of the errors in usage occur when the different parts of speech change their forms to indicate use. If the pronoun he had no form but he, the pupil would have no trouble with he. Since the pronouns you and it have the same forms in the nominative and objective cases, the pupil has no reason to confuse the two cases.

Evidently the errors made most often in verb usage have to do with subject and verb agreement. Thomas C. Blaisdell makes the statement that it has been estimated that eighty-five per cent of the verb errors are with thirteen verbs: see, come, do, go, run, sit, break, lie, give, begin, ring, take,

¹ Thomas C. Blaisdell, Ways to Teach English (Garden City, 1930), p. 143.

and write.¹ Except for lie and sit, the errors made with these verbs result from a confusion of the principal parts of the verb.

The errors tabulated in this study were taken from written work during November, February, and May. In her study the investigator found the seventh grade 85.5 per cent, or fifty-three of the sixty-two members in the class violated the use of correct principal parts in verb usage. Continuing verb classifications, the researcher found that fifty-five or 88.7 per cent of the class had errors in subject and verb agreement. Lie and lay, sit and set errors were made by 75.8 per cent or forty-seven members in the class.

The following are typical errors taken from seventh grade English papers:

1. The river has froze and many have drove across it.
2. He has rode until he has growed use to it.
3. The weather had growed so cold that the leaves had fell.
4. If he had ran his best, he could have won.
5. The boy rung the bell and ran away.

A second set of papers revealed 75.8 per cent, or forty-seven of the sixty-two pupils violating principal parts of verb

¹ Ibid., p. 143.

Seventy-nine per cent or forty-nine pupils had errors in subject and verb agreement while lie and lay and sit and set errors were made by sixty-five per cent or forty pupils in the class.

The principal parts were violated with such usage as:

1. Rita saw her chance and done her best.
2. If we had went we could have seen the parade.
3. He knew he had chose the wrong number.
4. Jack doesn't know that you was there.
5. We drunk the lemonade after we had grown tired.

The third and test set of exercises on verb tense revealed sixty-five per cent or forty of the sixty-two pupils made errors. Subject and verb errors included 74.2 per cent or forty-five of the pupils continuing this violation. Forty-three students or 69.4 per cent continued to misuse lie and lay and sit and set. It is interesting to note that thirteen of the forty-two errors that the judges in Current English Usage ranked as illiterate were errors in the use of the principal parts of the verb and the incorrect use of sit and lie.¹ The teacher may know that he is attacking the worst errors when he seeks to rid his pupils' papers of such errors.

The writer finds it easier to teach verbs lie and lay and sit and set if the terms transitive and intransitive are

¹ Leonard A. Sterling, Current English Usage (Chicago, 1932), pp. 174-176.

not used at all. The teacher must first warn the pupil that sound is not a test for determining the correct form of these verbs. If he has been accustomed to hearing the wrong form, it sounds just as well, often better, than the correct form. The teacher must be sure that the student knows the forms that go with each verb, for without being able to recognize what forms go with what verbs, the pupil can never gain mastery in the use of these verbs. Some pupils have a great deal of trouble because the form lay is the present tense of lie and a similar form is the past tense of lie. To make progress in the mastery of these verbs the teacher must first get rid of these troubles of sound and tense form.

When the pupils are sure of the forms that go with each verb, they are ready to find out whether a form of sit or a form of set is to be used. They should ask themselves this question: Does the verb have an object? If it does, use the correct form of the verbs lay and set. If it does not, use the correct form of the verbs lie and sit. Suppose the student is trying to determine what form to use in the sentence.

The snow (lay, laid) four feet deep. He must first ask himself whether something is placed somewhere. Since there is no object, the pupil uses lay, the past tense of lie. The teacher should constantly emphasize that something must be

placed somewhere before the pupil can use a form of lay. In a sentence like:

I left my book (lying, laying) on one of these desks, some pupils may assume that laying is correct, since, he reasons, someone placed the book upon the desk. To this reason, the teacher may answer that at one time someone placed the book on the desk, but at the present time the book is reclining or resting upon the desk.

Occasionally a pupil maintains that he has been taught that lie and sit are always used with people and lay and set with things. Such a statement is certainly erroneous and the pupil must see that he can "set a child in a chair" or "that the book can lie" on the desk," and that "the chairs can sit around the table." He should see that one says, "I shall lie down" because he does not have the physical power to pick his own body up and place it on the bed. Such examples usually enable the pupil to see that the form does not depend on whether he is dealing with a person or thing but whether he is placing some person or thing somewhere or some person or thing is resting somewhere.

Forty-nine of the pupils or 90.7 per cent in the eighth grade made errors in the principal parts of verbs while 83.3 or forty-five pupils were incorrectly using subject and the

verb agreement. Seventy-four percent or forty pupils had difficulty with lie, lay, sit, and set.

A total of 458 errors was made in verb usage of which ninety-seven were in principal parts, 308 in subject and verb agreement, and fifty-three in the use of lie and lay and sit and set.

The following errors were taken from the eighth grade papers:

1. It could not have happen to a nicer person.
2. She have the best flower garden in North Heights.
3. The North Heights Park is one place that have had much improvement.
4. I wish to congratulate you for the trip you is taking to France.
5. They have tore down the old club house and build a new one.

A second check revealed 85.2 or forty-six pupils made errors in the principal parts of verbs. Forty-two pupils or 77.8 per cent of the class made errors in subject and verb agreement. Lie, lay, and sit and set errors were made by thirty-eight or 70.4 per cent of the class.

Though drink is not listed as one of the thirteen verbs that account for eighty-five per cent of the errors in verbs a number of even the best pupils often misuse it. For some unexplained reason pupils have an aversion to using have drunk

or had drunk. Twenty pupils out of fifty-four failed to find an error in the sentence:

Somebody had drunk my glass of water.

Even on the final test in the ninth grade eleven out of thirty-six pupils changed drunk to drank in the sentence:

He had already drunk his fill of milk.

On the final test in the tenth grade eleven out of thirty-six pupils changed drunk to drank in the sentence:

After I had drunk a glass of milk, I felt better.

The only suggestion that the writer can make for mastering the correct form of verb tense is constant repetition of the correct verb tense, for the writer believes the pupil must make the mistake because of sound.

The method for correcting errors in the use of the principal parts of the verb is the same for all verbs. First, see what verb forms the pupils confuse. Tabulate the verbs that give trouble. Drill constantly on them until each pupil has mastered the individual verbs that trouble him.

The test papers from the eighth grade revealed of forty-three pupils from the original forty-nine making errors in the principal parts of verbs. A check of subject and verb agreement showed forty-one of the original forty nine eighth graders

made errors. The lie, lay, and sit, and set usage violations decreased from the original forty who made these errors to thirty-seven.

Before attempting to have the pupil master any of the special fields of trouble under agreement of verbs, the teacher should not overlook the difficulty that many pupils have in distinguishing between the third person singular and the third person plural of verbs. They do not have trouble in distinguishing between the singular and plural of irregular verbs but with those verbs that form their third person singular by adding es or s. Since the pupils have been accustomed to forming plurals of nouns by adding s and es, it is hard for them to realize that the singular of a verb is formed in the same way as the plural of a noun. Thus the teacher who sees that all pupils know the form of the third person plural and singular has gone a long way toward helping the pupil master his difficulties in agreement.

Thirty-six pupils in the ninth grade began the study with 86.1 per cent or 31 who made errors in the principal parts of verbs. A total of twenty-eight or 77.7 per cent were found to have made errors in subject and verb agreement while errors in the use of lie, lay, sit, and set constituted the smaller number of twenty-three pupils or 63.8 per cent of the class.

The second set of papers revealed a further decrease of twenty-nine or 80.5 per cent of the pupils who made errors in the principal parts; twenty-five or 69.4 per cent made errors in subject and verb disagreement. Twenty-one or 58.3 per cent of the pupils made errors in the use of lie, lay, sit and set.

The test papers revealed a slight decrease in errors in the three categories as twenty-seven or 79.3 per cent made errors in the principal parts of verbs; twenty-three or 67.2 per cent made errors in subject and verb agreement. Lie, lay, sit, and set errors numbered twenty-one or 58.3, per cent of the class.

Typical errors from ninth grade papers are listed:

1. There are no use to try said Peggy.
2. Bill and John was planning to go.
3. Mike ran to tell us that the window was broke.
4. We knew that Lewis had began taking flying lessons.
5. The boys have swam and dived all morning, they come home tired and hungry.

One type of error in agreement that a teacher needs to help about fifty per cent of her pupils conquer is failure to make the verb agree with a compound subject. Twenty-three out of thirty-six pupils failed to correct the sentence from a tenth grade paper:

On the table there was a book by Willa Cather and another by Mark Twain.

Pupils have trouble with this sentence for two reasons.

Some of the pupils think of table as the subject. Others consider only one-half of the subject and choose their verb as soon as they have read "a book by Willa Cather." In defending that usage, several students said that they used the singular because one would not say "on the table were a book by Willa Cather." The teacher must make the pupils see that "a book" is the other half. A better way, however, to show them that the plural verb is required is to state the sentence in its natural order. Pupils should be sure about the number of the subject before they decide on the verb to use. That pupils can readily improve in determining what number of the verb to use in sentences similar to the example given is illustrated in the fact that only six of the same pupils who missed the sentences given in the first paragraph failed to correct the following sentence:

On the table was a vase and two books.

The tenth grade class revealed from the first check of written work thirty-three or 88.9 per cent of the pupils totaling thirty-six made errors in principal parts. There were twenty-nine or 80.6 per cent who made errors in subject and verb agreement. Twenty-five or 69.4 per cent used lie, lay, sit and set incorrectly.

A second check showed a decrease of twenty-eight or 77.8 per cent in verb tense and twenty-three or 63.9 per cent in subject and verb agreement and twenty or fifty-six per cent in the use of lie and lay and sit and set.

The final test revealed a decrease only in the use of lie and lay and sit and set. Eighteen or fifty-five per cent of the pupils made errors in this area.

Few pupils have trouble learning what form of the verb to use when the sentence begins with there and the number of the verb is determined by the number of the word that comes after it. Eighteen tenth grade pupils failed to correct this sentence, which was given in the test:

There seems to be innumerable lights blazing yonder.
Later not a single pupil in the same class failed to correct the sentence:

There was several men trying to put the fire out.

This improvement shows that pupils have little trouble learning what form to use in such sentences.

The correct number of the verb to use with a relative pronoun puzzles even the best students. The number of times the pronoun was misused indicated a need for drill.

The seventh grade papers revealed a decrease of errors in pronoun usage as compared to verbs. Thirty-six out of sixty-

two seventh graders made errors on the first set of papers. Twenty-eight continued the errors on the second set of papers and the test showed an improved group with only eighteen violating the same skill. Representative of the sentences from the seventh grade group included:

1. It is I who is responsible for the delay. (Twenty-seven out of sixty-two violated pronoun usage in the first group of written work).
2. She is one of those girls who evades a correct answer. (Twenty-one out of sixty-two violated the pronoun rule in the second sentence.)
3. That is one of those cars that is extensively advertised. (Twenty-three out of sixty-two)

The pupil can determine the correct number to use in the relative clause by substituting the antecedent of the pronoun for the pronoun and using the form of the verb he would use if the antecedent were the subject of the verb. In a sentence taken from a seventh grade paper,

It is I who is responsible for the delay, the pupil must think of I, the antecedent of who. Whatever verb form would be used with I must be used with who.

The test papers revealed 60.9 per cent or thirty-nine of the pupils continued to violate pronoun usage. A typical example from the test papers on which nineteen out of thirty-nine made an error is the sentence:

She is one of those girls who evades a correct answer.

(Nineteen out of thirty-nine)

Pupils in the eighth grade had an 88.9 per cent or forty-eight in the class who violated pronoun usage.

The second set of papers designed to decrease errors previously made showed a reduction of 85.2 or forty-six pupils made errors in pronoun usage.

A final test revealed a further decrease of forty-three pupils or 79.6 per cent of the class.

If the pupil could remember that in a sentence beginning with an expression like "He is one of those boys" and ending with a relative clause, those, not one, is the antecedent of the relative pronoun. In such sentences the relative pronoun is always plural.

Ninth grade pupils began the first check with an eighty-three per cent or thirty pupils out of the total thirty-six violating pronoun usage. The second set revealed a further decrease of twenty-eight or 77.7 per cent made errors. The test revealed twenty-six or 72.2 per cent made errors in pronouns.

Tenth graders' papers revealed a percentage of errors similar to the errors in the violation of the other grammatical errors in this study. Thirty-three or 91.7 per cent of the class made errors in the first set of papers. Twenty-nine or

80.6 per cent in the second set and the test revealed twenty-five or 69.5 per cent who continued to violate pronoun usage. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of pupils from the tenth grade that used the wrong form in the sentence.

1. Everyone except he approved. (12)
2. Girls like she are always lucky. (11)
3. Nobody was left but he. (25)
4. None of the guests were late except he. (28)

Spelling errors troubled the students in this study to a high degree. Sound here seems to be a determining factor in the correct spelling of words. Pupils will not make errors as often if constant drill is done to eliminate incorrect spelling.

Table I

The table which follows reveals the frequency of errors of twenty-one words taken from three sets of papers from the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth grades respectively. Errors in spelling were made by all members of each class for the months, November, February, and May.

Frequency of Misspelled Words

Words	Seventh Grade (62)	Eighth Grade (54)	Ninth Grade (36)	Tenth Grade (36)
1. receive	149	116	98	77
2. grammar	99	79	48	89
3. library	67	58	101	63
4. perspire	31	14	7	12
5. dictionary	83	108	49	37
6. insurance	7	4	3	--
7. February	31	16	13	8
8. separate	65	63	13	14
9. truly	34	19	53	31
10. believe	48	39	16	23
11. misspelled	20	15	3	9
12. business	16	39	14	17
13. government	10	7	39	43
14. hoping	101	73	28	19
15. pleasant	43	13	28	39
16. forty	73	69	55	41
17. there	113	83	79	92
18. their	93	76	44	28
19. beginning	13	39	21	15
20. coming	10	17	9	16
21. sophomore	12	9	10	38
Total	1118	956	744	711

Anyone who notices errors in grammar notes how frequently errors are made in the use of adjectives and adverbs.

The use of the adverb to modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb and avoidance of the double negative were deciding factors in errors made in this study. The number of errors here rate much lower than those made in verb usage.

Seventh grade errors totaled twenty-six for the first check of adjective and adverb usage; twenty-two on the second set of papers and sixteen on the third set. Errors as recorded from seventh grade papers are:

1. The child felt so badly that I sent her home.
2. I do not feel so good as I did yesterday.
3. I am not as eager to go as I was.
4. Mary was sure pleased with her grades.

The common confusion of an adjective for an adverb is usually after such copulative verbs as feeling, smelling, and tasting. The pupil is especially likely to believe that "I feel badly" is correct. The writer has found that this explanation helps the pupil to use the correct form after this verb: If badly is correct, it must associate with the verb feel; therefore the sentence would mean "I feel badly because something is the matter with my fingers; perhaps I have sores on them."

Eighth grade papers checked in the first group had thirty-three out of fifty-four persons making errors in adverb and adjective usage. A second check revealed twenty-nine out of fifty-four and the test twenty-four out of fifty-four.

Ninth grade papers in the same usage revealed twenty-four out of thirty-six in the first check of errors, twenty-two in the second check and eighteen in the test.

The adjective and adverb error totaled twenty-seven out of thirty-six for the tenth grade on the first check and twenty-three on the second set of papers. Finally the test revealed a decrease of three as twenty out of twenty-three made errors. A sentence from the tenth grade is

The tiny wren sings sweet from the hidden nest.

Capitalization and punctuation errors were especially noticeable in themes and letter writing.

Papers of seventh graders in the first check revealed the whole class (62) failing to capitalize proper nouns and failing to use commas, periods and apostrophes correctly. The second check revealed a slight decrease in errors made. Fifty-nine of the total number of pupils made errors. The test showed only fifty-three of the sixty-two continuing to use capital letters and punctuation marks incorrectly. A typical example from the seventh grade follows:

Amarillo Texas
 1612 N W 15 St
 April 9, 1953

Mr Charlie Young, Manager
 The Borden Company, Box 2051
 Amarillo Texas

Dear Mr Young:

I want to tell you how much I like the Idea of you going to france. you can be gone as long as you want too. I will take good care of everything while you are gone.

Yours truly,

John Blank

Ninth grade errors totaled twenty-three out of thirty-six on the first check, twenty out of thirty-six on the second count and eighteen out of thirty-six on the test. An example from the ninth grades follows:

Ivanhoe

Not withstanding the obiding of his friend. Wamba could not help from lengering on the road. In that pleasent district of Merry England, watered by the river Don. There was a large forest which covered the greater part between the towns of Sheffield and Doncaster.

Tenth grade students made twenty-six out of thirty-six errors on the first check, twenty-three out of thirty-six on the second check and nineteen out of thirty-six on the test. Omission of question marks and apostrophes determined many of

the errors made among this group. In the sentence

Will you wring those heavy garments Martha
all punctuatuion was omitted. Examples of punctuation, capital-
ization and spelling may be noticed. One exercise from the
tenth grade is given:

The Sophomore Class in History have had some very in-
teresting facts in the modern events. We have been studying
things of today and tomorrow, not the past. We bring in
clipping from various magazines such as The Time, Life, Courier
Look, and the Newspapers. We have been keeping up with our own
President, Eisenhower. One topic in particular from the Life
Magazine How Hellish Is the H-Bomb.

Poor sentence structure restricted the writers of papers
in grades seven through ten in expression of facts. Run-on
sentences as well as fragmentary sentences were found in eval-
uating papers. The writer chose the fragmentary sentence for
discussion in this thesis, because there were more fragmentary
errors discovered in the writings of the students.

The seventh grade errors made included thirty-eight
of the original sixty-two and in the second tabulation thirty-
three errors were discovered. The test revealed thirty-one
errors still being made by the original sixty-two persons.
Examples from the seventh grade papers included:

1. How to write correctly, too.
2. Studying hard to master troublesome words.
3. Pupils in the seventh grade in our school,

The first check of errors in the eighth grade found forty-nine persons out of fifty-four using fragmentary sentences. A second check revealed forty-three out of fifty-four continuing the errors. Results of the test showed forty out of fifty-four still using fragmentary sentences. Errors made by eighth grade pupils included:

1. For it is a very important day in the life of preparation.
2. Sleepy, write again soon.
3. By realizing to make good.

Ninth grade students were guilty of sentence fragments in their written work. Twenty-five of the thirty-six ninth grade students used sentence fragments in themes, letter writing, and paragraphs. A second check revealed twenty-three persons continuing the use of fragmentary sentences. The test showed twenty of the twenty-three in the second group used fragmentary sentences.

Illustrations from ninth grade papers include:

1. Something more than raising crops
2. Then up to St. Louis
3. Tarpaulin leaked

Errors were made by twenty-nine persons in the first check of the tenth grade persons. A second set of papers revealed twenty-three persons using fragmentary sentences. Finally the test revealed twenty-two persons violating complete sentence usage. Typical fragmentary sentences found in the tenth grade work are listed:

1. Chopsticks used by Chinese
2. Suddenly stretched out his hand and stretched
3. Mother thinking that I was late to school
4. Trying to decide on a new pattern

The writer has included the most common errors in grammar as determined by an analysis of language usage by the students in this study. A deciding factor in determining the most common errors resulted from the actual count of the errors made by students in this study.

Chapter III

WAYS TO WORK FOR ACCURACY

It is the writer's purpose in this chapter to point out some ways that will simplify the teaching of grammar and aid in the mastery of correct usage. If the plans resulting from this comprehensive study in the Carver School are followed consistently from day to day and even year to year, pupils will make progress in the mastery of language skills.

1. Nothing is more important in the mastery of skills than the pupils's attitude toward his mastery of skills. Unless the pupil has a sincere desire to learn, the teacher is practically powerless as far as that individual is concerned. Most high school pupils are reasonable and realize that accuracy in the use of language is essential for everyday use. If the teacher can succeed in impressing the pupil with the importance of the task before him, the average pupil is willing to work consistently to conquer his errors.

That this rightful heritage may be fully attained by every American boy and girl, Sherwin Cody in his book, The Art of Writing and Speaking the English Language writes: If there is a subject of really universal interest and utility, it is the art of writing and speaking one's own language

effectively. It is the basic art of culture, as we all know, it is the basis of business. Indeed, the way we talk and write letters determines our success in life."¹

2. The teacher of grammar and language usage must attack one error at a time and the time of misuse. This error must be worked on until most of the class have mastered it. He must continue at frequent intervals to review even those skills that he believes the pupils have mastered, for only in that way may the habits of correct usage be firmly established. Most beginning teachers fail to realize the amount of drill that is necessary for mastery. Unless the teacher can show the students that the correct use of grammar is an aid to expression and that expression is an important item in determining their success in life, his students will not spend the time on drill necessary to make correct usage an everyday ritual.² It cannot be emphasized too much that mastery is more important than speed or covering a certain number of pages in a textbook. Even when a year's work is finished, the teacher must realize that the next year he must continue his drills on the skills taught the year before.

¹ Sherwin Cody, The Art of Writing and Speaking the English Language (New York, 1903), p. 124.

² Hatfield, op. cit., p. 309.

3. Short dictation exercises are of importance in the teaching of accuracy in grammatical structure. Four sentences are enough for seventh and eighth grade classes, and six sentences are enough for the ninth and tenth grades. The exercises should never be longer than ten sentences unless the teacher is giving a full length dictation assignment to the ninth or tenth grade. The teacher should have enough of these exercises to cover all subject matter for the term. The most convenient way to keep them is to arrange filing cards according to subject matter.¹ The exercises below are samples of exercises that the writer has used in her own classes:

Dictation Exercise on the Agreement of Subject and Verb

Choose the correct form of the verb in the parentheses and give reason for your choice:

1. One of the sisters (was, were) studying French.
2. We (ran, run) to line when the bell (rang, rung).
3. I have (saw, seen) Ida every day this week.
4. There (is, are) four girls named Dorothy in our 7B room.
5. (Those, Them) girls are cousins.

Some might question the advisability of having the pupils

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give reasons for their choices, since the only aim is accuracy in form. Pupils often guess or go by sound if they do not have to give the reason for using the form they are using. Unless the pupil knows the reason, he is prepared to use the correct form only when the sentences appear in the same form from time to time. Let each pupil check his own paper and explain to him that the teacher is using the exercise to help the student in his mastery of language usage.

Dictation Exercise on Personal Pronouns

Choose the correct form in the parentheses and give the reason for your choice:

1. It wasn't (he, him) who called.
2. Please buy Betty and (I, me) an ice cream soda.
3. It was not (we, us) who made the choice.
4. If I (was, were) (she, her), I would not go.

Dictation Exercise on Correct Usage of Capital Letters

Capitalize the necessary words in each sentence and give a reason for your choice:

1. will rogers and mark twain were great american humorists
2. betty and susan have gone to fort worth.
3. calgary is a most important city in canada.
4. dr. h. b. wilson has been transferred to camp carson.
5. who was the author of little women?

Dictation Exercises on the Correct Conjugation of Verbs

Write in the absent verb tense and use the tense correctly in a sentence:

	Present Tense	Past Tense	Past Participle
1.	shear	_____	shorn
2.	_____	shrove	shriven
3.	thrust	thrust	_____
4.	_____	_____	stuck
5.	stride	_____	_____

The students learn by normal desirable manipulation of the parts concerned. No time has been spent trying to teach the students grammatical terminology but simple usage for oral and written purposes. Grammar so taught is certain to be practical because it is learned not merely for use but in use.¹

4. If a teacher is to know the individual differences, he must keep an error sheet for each pupil. This simplifies the work for the teacher and enables him to discover a pupil's troubles in time to help him. It takes but a few minutes even in a large class to record the errors made by each pupil as

¹ Hatfield, op. cit., p. 229.

the pupil calls them out and the teacher puts them down on the individual error sheets.

The important reason for learning the parts of speech (and especially these parts of speech in this study) is not merely to classify words as such but to know to signal clearly to the reader the part of speech intended.¹

The examination of any error sheet reveals two facts which should have an important bearing on teaching. First, though the pupils make many errors, most of the errors may be grouped under a few classifications. These in general correspond with the errors which are most common for most of the pupils, but with enough differences to demand some individual attention. Second, pupils have a tendency to repeat the same errors from time to time. An examination of a few individual error sheets from the classes chosen for this study will show the truth of these statements. In the first of the error sheets examined most of the errors could be classified under one of four groups:

1. Error in the formation of the possessive case
2. Wrong case as object of the preposition
3. Error in the agreement of subject and verb
4. Error in the use of the principal parts of the verb

¹Luella B. Cook, "The End of the Trail," English Journal, XLI (December, 1952), 540-543.

Four times the pupil made errors in agreement of the subject and verb; three errors in the use of the wrong case after the preposition; five times he failed to form correctly the possessive of the noun. Another sheet revealed three errors in verb tense. An examination of the errors sheets reveals that these errors are common among the majority of the students.

These discoveries, made by examining the errors of the pupils, show that to do effective work, the teacher must take into account the errors made not only by the class as a whole but also by individual pupils. The teacher's aim should be to prevent the reoccurrence of as many errors as possible.

5. The teacher must hold the pupil responsible for the correct language usage in all of his written work. The student should write only sentences. Any time that he fails to use sentences of correct structure he should be penalized. If the pupil wants to use a fragmentary sentence for force, he should mark it with an asterisk and state in a footnote that it is an intentional sentence error. The use of the correct forms is not important if the pupil does not use them in all his expressions.

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6. The teacher will get better results from teaching grammatical usage, if he devotes a brief period of each lesson to the mastery of grammatical usage rather than full

length periods. Since English teachers have many other things to teach besides grammar, brief exercises at the beginning of each period will enable the pupils to master more grammar than if he studied it for several weeks for hour periods. The reason is obvious. The pupil does not concentrate as much on a long exercise as on a short exercise. For habit formation drills should be frequent and scattered over a long period of time. A brief exercise on grammar each day furnishes an opportunity for such habit formation.

7. In every class there are those retarded pupils who have to have a great deal of outside work in order to make the necessary progress. If the teacher wants to save both herself and the pupil a great deal of extra time and worry, she must begin early to help the pupil master the essentials that he should know.

The importance of special aptitude for handwork in industrial success is indicated by the fact that boys and girls who had done well and had been in the upper grades in manual training and other kinds of handwork taught in the special classes were more likely to be successful in their jobs after they left school than those who had done poor work and had been in lower grades.¹

Teaching only forms necessary for correct usage will help

¹ Samuel A. Kirk and H. Orville Johnson, Educating the Retarded Child (Boston, 1951), p. 231.

To produce accurate expression and form style. Pupils enjoy their grammar provided its teaching is progressive and adapted to the age and capabilities of the group.¹

Almost half of the errors made in adjectives and adverbs arose from the confusion of the two parts of speech. The teacher can help prevent this confusion by explaining that adjectives and adverbs are very careful about the company they keep; that an adverb is disgraced if it associated with anything except a verb, adjective or another adverb; and surely the pupil will not disgrace these aristocrats by letting them run around with the wrong forms. The definitions of adjectives and adverbs are the same as the usual definitions given them and are much easier for the pupil to use. The most common confusion of an adverb is after such copulative verbs as feeling, smelling, tasting, and appearing. The pupil is especially likely to believe that " I feel badly " is correct. The writer has found that this explanation helps the pupil to use the correct form after this verb: If badly is correct, it must associate with the verb feel; therefore the sentence would mean " I feel badly

1

Dorothy Dakin, How to Teach High School English (Boston, 1947), p. 41.

because something is the matter with my hand; perhaps I have broken it". If bad is used, then it must associate with I and the meaning is "My physical condition is bad". The pupil can see that the latter meaning is the true meaning of the sentence and that the adjective must be used. After this explanation the teacher may give this rule for the pupil to follow: Remember that feel is never followed by an adverb unless it means how you feel with your hands.

That this explanation will enable the pupil to use the correct form is attested by these two examples. Fifty-five pupils were given this sentence as one of a number of incorrect sentences:

Jane's defeat made us feel badly.

Thirty-three did not change the adverb to the adjective. No explanation of the correct form to use after the verb feel had been given. In another class of sixty-two students this sentence was given with a group of sentences containing various errors the day after the explanation of the correct use of modifiers after certain copulative verbs, feel being one of the discussed:

John feels badly.

Only two pupils failed to correct the sentence and both of those had been absent the day before. The teacher should not feel,

however, that one correct usage of the verbs by most of the pupils will insure the correct usage at all times in the future. Rule explanation by use of the rule is the best claim of justification. The explanation follows the usage instead of preceding it. Only numerous repetitions will establish the habitual use of the correct form, for several weeks later six of the pupils who had corrected the sentence above failed to find the error in the sentence:

I feel badly after losing a night's sleep.

A few more examples will show how the pupil may be positive about the correct form to use after the copulative verb. Take, for example, a sentence containing the word smell:

Flowers smell (sweet, sweetly) after the rain.

To use the adverb would mean that the flowers have noses and they go about smelling in a sweet manner. The pupil sees that the use of the adverb would make the meaning of the sentence ridiculous. The meaning of the sentence is that the odor of the flowers is sweet. In the same way the pupil can see that

The pie tastes sourly

would mean that the pie has a mouth and goes about its tasting in a sour manner. Even after these explanations, much drill is needed.

The errors covered in this chapter were those with which the pupils seemed most concerned.

Chapter IV

SOME PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult and certainly not possible to conclude a study on grammatical errors. In fact, after this past year of studying grammatical errors and devising methods of improving the teaching of grammar, the writer concludes that she has only scratched the surface of this important everyday usage.

What has been discovered about the errors made by the students in this study will be different from that in other schools and in the future.

Certain conclusions can be reached about any particular study made for a given period of time, and it is in this light that the conclusions in this study are made.

What practical conclusions can be drawn from this study that will be helpful in the teaching of grammatical usage in the classroom?

Beginning any constructive work in grammar necessitates motivation by the teacher. No pupil is willing to spend long hours of work in learning correct forms for the mere sake of knowing what is the correct form and what is not the correct form. He should see that unless he knows the accepted present day form of grammatical usage, he will be hampered in his social and business life. The wise teacher then will seek first

To create a desire for accurate, clear, and forceful language. Once the pupil has this desire, he finds real joy in mastering these forms which prevent his using the kind of expressions that he sincerely desires to use.

Once finding the errors that are most commonly made by pupils, the teacher should ask two questions before beginning the correction of these errors: Which of these errors most seriously handicap the pupil in his expression? The corrections of which of these errors are of such slight value to the pupil as to deserve little or no time? According to the writer's findings in this study she would list these as the major errors which should be attacked:

1. Errors in the wrong tense of the verb such as " I seen, " " I drunk, " " I have went, " or " I done";
2. Errors in the agreement of subject and verb such as " I plays, " " his eyes was, " and " I have rode";
3. Errors in the correct form of lie-lay and sit-set;
4. Errors in the use of the adjective and adverb, such as " She plays good, " " The soldiers fought brave, " " The paper seemed to be written careful. " and " That any be easy done";
5. Errors in spelling, such as " couragous, " " receive, " " sieze, " their for there, " " liberry, " " prespire, " and " dictionary";
6. Errors in forming the nominative and possessive case in pronouns and nouns, such as " child, " " men, " " Mary, " " poets, " " Burns, " and " girls".

The writer also concludes that the teacher can draw from these findings factors that will simplify the teaching of grammar. Only those parts of grammar that have functional use in enabling the pupil to write more accurately, clearly, and forcefully his own language should be emphasized. The noun should be taught in connection with capitalization and the forming of the possessive case. The number of verb to use with a collective noun can best be taught in connection with the subject and verb agreement factor. The classifying of the verb according to form and according to meaning has little value except with such verbs as lie-lay, sit-set, and rise-raise. A complete mastery of technical grammar is for the specialist in grammar, not for the thousands of high school students who will profit most by complete mastery of those few forms of grammatical usage which make for accuracy in written work and represent structure that he actually uses to communicate.

Finally this study and the writer's own experience in teaching grammatical usage would lead her to believe that our high schools could turn out pupils who would have mastered the essentials in grammatical usage if teachers had agreed on the essentials that pupils should master, confined their teaching to the forms that caused trouble, and then did their utmost to see that pupils mastered these forms. Until teachers of English do this, the pupils who leave their classes will lack

accuracy in grammatical usage and will be handicapped in the ability to express themselves.

This is not a study of importance to the investigator and Carver school alone, but to teachers of English who are shaping the minds and lives of the citizens of tomorrow.

Table II

Table II lists the total number and percentage of errors in each skill for grades seven and eight.

Table II

Skills	Errors Grade Seven		Errors Grade Eight	
	Percentage		Percentage	
1. Verbs	419	49.8	401	45.3
2. Pronouns	82	9.8	137	15.4
3. Adjectives and Adverbs	64	7.6	86	9.7
4. Sentence Fragments	102	12.1	132	14.9
Capitalization				
5. and Punctuation	174	20.7	130	14.7
Total	841	100	886	100

Table III

Table III lists the total number and percentage of errors in each skill for grades nine and ten.

Table III

Skills	Errors Grade Nine	Percentage	Errors Grade Ten	Percentage
1. Verbs	225	44.8	226	43.1
2. Pronouns	84	16.7	87	16.5
3. Adjectives and Adverbs	64	12.7	70	13.3
4. Sentence Fragments	68	13.5	74	14.1
5. Capitalization and Punctuation	61	12.3	68	13.0
Total	502	100	525	100

Table IV

Table IV lists the total number of errors and percentage in all of the grades.

Table IV

Errors	English Seven Eight Nine Ten	Percentage
1. Verbs	1261	45.9
2. Pronouns	390	14.2
3. Adjectives and Adverbs	284	10.3
4. Sentence Fragments	376	13.3
5. Capitalization and Punctuation	433	16.3
Grand Total	2744	100

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